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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000293

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)

SUBJECT: CONDITION OF FORMER MENNONITE PRISONERS MISSTATED IN NGO PRESS RELEASE

REF: A) HCMC 086 B) HCMC 212 C) HCMC 221

1. (SBU) Summary: UK-based NGO Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) issued a press release on March 15 alleging torture of a number of the Mennonite Six; followers of Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang who were arrested following a confrontation with police officers in March 2004. Key statements in the release are at odds with the facts, based on our meetings with the subjects and information from other well informed sources. Pastor Quang and his followers have a history of conflict with the police and of exaggerating these incidents for international media attention. ConGen provides contingency press guidance below. End Summary.

2. (SBU) The CSW press release referenced the case of brothers and former prisoners Nguyen Thanh Nhan and Nguyen Hieu Nghia and current prisoner/mental hospital patient Le Thi Hong Lien, stating that "one [brother] is now partially paralysed (sic) and the other has conditions which may be life-threatening." The two brothers, along with two other Mennonites, were arrested in March after a confrontation between Pastor Quang's followers and the police. We met separately with both men at length in January after their release from prison and also had the opportunity to review their medical records (Ref A). There was no immediately visible evidence that they had suffered sustained or systematic abuse by prison authorities. On 22 February, Nguyen Thanh Nhan again visited the Consulate. In addition to appearing physically sound, Poloff watched him run across six lanes of traffic in front of the Consulate building with no obvious signs of physical distress.

3. (SBU) The press release also refers to imprisoned Mennonite Le Thi Hong Lien. Following her arrest, Lien appears to have suffered a mental breakdown. ConGen has followed her case closely and urged authorities to provide her medical care and humanitarian release. The CSW press release stated that Lien had been brought to Bien Hoa Mental Hospital for an examination but subsequently had been returned to Tong Le Chan Prison. Lien's father, Le Quang Du, told us that his daughter was evaluated at Bien Hoa Mental Hospital on March 1 and then was returned to prison but was transferred to the hospital for long-term care shortly thereafter. He visited her in the mental hospital on 4 March and again on 11 March. Du stated that Lien was showing signs of improvement: where previously she had been disoriented and unresponsive, she now addressed her father and enquired about the whereabouts of possessions confiscated prior to her transfer to Tong Le Chan prison.

4. (SBU) Proposed contingency guidance:

Q: What can you tell us about alleged abuse of the two Vietnamese Mennonite brothers, Nguyen Thanh Nhan and Nguyen Hieu Nghia and of another Mennonite prisoner, Ms. Le Thi Hong Lien?

A:

-- THE UNITED STATES STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE BASIC RIGHT OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN VIETNAM AND HAS PRESSED THE GOVERNMENT TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF ALL VIETNAMESE TO WORSHIP FREELY.

-- OUR CONSULATE GENERAL HAS MET WITH BOTH NGUYEN THANH NHAN AND NGUYEN HIEU NGHIA AND REVIEWED THEIR MEDICAL RECORDS. NEITHER BROTHER APPEARED TO BE SUFFERING SERIOUS MEDICAL PROBLEMS ON THOSE OCCASIONS.

-- REGARDING MS. LIEN, WE HAVE URGED VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES TO PROVIDE HER ADEQUATE MEDICAL ATTENTION AND TO RELEASE HER FROM PRISON ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT MS. LIEN IS NOW IN LONG-TERM CARE AT BIEN HOA MENTAL HOSPITAL.

WINNICK